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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 002450

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EFIN](#) [KDEM](#) [KCOR](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: UNITED RUSSIA POISED TO SWEEP ELECTIONS IN MOSCOW
OBLAST

REF: A. MOSCOW 2102
[B](#). MOSCOW 571

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan Elliott. Reason: 1.
4 (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: United Russia has a great advantage and is poised to sweep the elections in the Moscow Oblast, where opposition groups have little support and laws are easily broken. The hot button political issues in the October 11 elections are taxes, land distribution, and corruption. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On October 11, in Moscow Oblast, 289 heads and 3,000 deputies of city councils and local governments, including mayors, will be elected. According to the election observation NGO GOLOS, "tense struggles are underway in many municipal Moscow Oblast entities."

Moscow Oblast Elections - What's at Stake?

[1](#)3. (C) Moscow Oblast, with an estimated population of seven million people (distinct from the city with an official population of 11.5 million), has 4,000 communities and 300 mayors and it includes 15 cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. The Moscow Oblast is huge and difficult to control, with different political regimes within various cities. Georgiy Prokopov, an expert on regional studies, told us July 15 that Moscow Oblast is a "closed region" and the local government withholds a lot of information about it. Aleksey Titkov, a regional studies expert, added July 21 that "Moscow Oblast is one of the most difficult regions to follow because it has so many separate cities and political systems." According to Titkov, the most compelling political issues are in regions closest to Moscow City where most resources are concentrated.

[1](#)4. (C) Boris Nadezhdin, Moscow Oblast leader for the newly elected Kremlin-backed, pro-business Right Cause party told us June 10 that the three main areas of interest in the upcoming October 11 elections are the fair distribution of land resources, lowering taxes, and corruption. Regional expert Prokopov confided, however, that the elections are unlikely to make a difference and explained that Governor Boris Gromov controlled all of the Moscow Oblast elections conducted last year. He told us that Gromov allocated budget money to certain cities as a favor or bribe so that the mayors would ensure that the elections ran in United Russia's favor. Regional expert Titkov added that almost all candidates have skeletons in their closets, often involving bribes, illegal privatization, illegal construction, and real estate. According to Titkov, real competition in elections exists, but the Moscow Oblast government uses its administrative resources to pressure certain candidates. Independent regional analyst Aleksandr Kynev was more cynical July 24 when he stated that elections in the Moscow Oblast

would merely be personal fights between businessmen.

Land Distribution Affects Wealth

15. (C) The distribution of land in the Moscow Oblast is a point of controversy because it means wealth. Some areas are more agriculturally based, while others have more industry. The wealthiest and most developed regions are within 25 km of Moscow City. Apartments in Moscow City are very expensive, while land in the Moscow Oblast is less expensive, especially the further out one goes. There are a few big cities connected to the Moscow Oblast Government administration, so these areas receive preferential treatment. Titkov told us that the western portion of the Moscow Oblast, which includes some nature reserves, has the most land-related scandals since it is a very desirable area for residential development.

Paying Taxes in Moscow City or Moscow Oblast

16. (C) Nadezhdin told us that residents often live in the Moscow Oblast, but work in Moscow City. About a million and a half cars are driven into Moscow City each day. These commuters pay income taxes through their workplace and the money goes to the Moscow City, while the Oblast is not included in this tax revenue stream. (Note: One hundred percent of these income taxes goes to the Moscow City budget since 70 percent are regional and 30 percent are municipal, but Moscow City enjoys the same status as that of a region.) According to Nadezhdin, the average income in Moscow City is

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40,000 rubles per month while it is only 20,000 rubles per month in the Moscow Oblast, so it is advantageous to live in the Oblast but work in Moscow City. However, the cost of living in Moscow Oblast is much lower than in Moscow City. It should be noted, however, that two million Muscovites live in their dachas, or summer homes, in the Moscow Oblast during the summer season and do not pay income taxes in Moscow City when they are not working.

Extreme Corruption

17. (C) According to experts and political observers, Moscow Oblast is rife with corruption, which has a great impact on politics. Prokopov confirmed that journalists do investigate and at least some of the corruption is revealed. Examples have included officials using their positions to buy the best pieces of land for the most favorable prices, as well as corruption related to Moscow Oblast's debt. According to Prokopov, Governor Gromov controls state-owned companies, such as construction companies, which have large debts that impact the Oblast budget (ref. A). Ultimately, the residents have shouldered the burden of these debts.

18. (C) Kynev told us that there are very big corruption scandals in Moscow Oblast which result in political killings every few months. These "criminal politics" have involved killing journalists and politicians, as well as taking enormous bribes. Kynev cited four recent scandals in addition to the one in Khimki, where in 2008, an attempted murder on journalist Mikhail Beketov, resulted in his being hospitalized with severe injuries including the amputation of his leg and fingers (ref. B). Kynev said that several years ago in Podolsk, former Mayor Aleksandr Fokin was found guilty of organizing the murder of a rival candidate during the elections. Three years ago, the mayor in the town of Chekhov, a huge criminal figure, died in a suspect automobile accident. Likewise, the mayor in Troetsk was killed, and the mayor in Ozeri disappeared and was never found. Kynev said that, "most deaths are related to the real estate business in Russia, a real criminal enterprise." He added that ethnic criminal groups in the Moscow Oblast, including ones

comprised of Chechens, Dagestanis, Tatars, and Tajiks, congregate in the Moscow Oblast. The further away from the center of Moscow, he said, the more difficult it is to control the chaos.

The Political Players in the Moscow Oblast

¶9. (C) Political opposition in the Moscow Oblast is very weak, but there are some influential individuals, whose personal politics revolve around protecting their business interests. Right Cause's Nadezhdin was a Deputy in Khimki, so he has some support there and in the city of Dolgoprudni. He told us that he is not supported in the entire region and does not have enough resources to have a strong influence oblast-wide. Nadezhdin told us that Vladimir Pekarev is a United Russia-backed Deputy in the Russian State Duma who owns the spirit production company "Ost-Alco." He has a factory in Chernogolovka and is influential in the east of Moscow Oblast. He backs political candidates who are not always on the United Russia ticket. Gennady Gudkov, a Just Russia Deputy in the State Duma, also has political interests in the region. He has a lot of different businesses and is connected with the city of Mytishchi. He is linked to the management in a factory that produces trains in which he formerly worked. Gudkov has been known to try to advance his own people as mayors and the person he supported in Stupinski region successfully won on a Just Russia platform. These influential individuals are presumably making political strides which they hope could eventually catapult them to the gubernatorial level.

¶10. (C) According to Prokopov, Pekarev and Gudkov are inside the system and do not represent real opposition to the ruling United Russia party. Prokopov told us that although there is no real opposition in the Moscow Oblast, there are some weak political networks in addition to Nadezhdin's Right Cause, such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), that have a presence and offices in different cities. Kynev told us that the previous Communist structure still exists in the Moscow Oblast and that the Communists are growing in the larger cities. He said that the Communists are concentrated in science towns and places like Kolomna and Lubertsy. According to Titkov, Yabloko is weak in the Moscow Oblast, and the Solidarity Movement is not a registered political party and therefore cannot fill a slate of candidates. Kynev added that business tycoon Alexander Lebedev always gets

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10-15 percent popular support in the Moscow Oblast. Titkov argued that not a single party openly speaks out against Gromov. Mariya-Luiza Tirmaste, a journalist at Kommersant, told us July 28 told us that although opposition parties technically exist in the Moscow Oblast Duma, there is no real opposition and everything is done through relationships and through the use of the budget.

Comment

¶11. (C) Despite repeated efforts, officials in Moscow Oblast have refused to meet with us. Although elections are looming, it appears that, as in Moscow City, United Russia and big business have a firm grip on the area. The elections will unlikely have much impact on the deep-rooted criminal activity and corruption that permeates the region.

Rubin